

THE EUGENICS REVIEW

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"Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally."

NOTES OF THE QUARTER

IT was almost to be expected that the draft Sterilization Bill which was published in the October REVIEW would cause something of a sensation. At the same time, we were quite prepared for a distinctly unfavourable reception, except in scientific and intellectual circles where the need for some such Bill has long been recognized. In fact, neither expectation was exactly realized. The Bill, from the columns devoted to it, was undoubtedly news; but it was not a 'sensation.' The tone of comment, in popular papers as well as in those with a more select circulation, was quiet and favourable. "Something must be done about the burden of defect," was the general attitude, "and this seems a sensible first step." Indeed, the chief criticism of several responsible writers was rather that the step was perhaps too small, and that sterilization ought to be made compulsory.

This could not have happened even ten years ago.

Then, in November, there was a discussion on sterilization at the annual meeting of the Association of Poor Law Unions. Opinion, again, tended to be favourable; and the Council of the Associa-

tion is now considering the two following resolutions:

"That in order to prevent the propagation of mental disorder and deficiency every mental hospital and visiting committee should take steps to ensure that to every patient prior to discharge, either recovered or relieved, it be fully explained that in their own interest as well as that of the State, they should remain childless, facilities towards this end being offered but not enforced."

And:

"That the Association urge the Ministry of Health to issue an Order to the County Council Visiting Committee of the Mental Hospitals, that before the patients are discharged, it *shall* be the duty of such committee to advise them that in their own and the public interest they should remain childless, and give the necessary advice to such patients."

The Council is awaiting "a more authoritative expression of opinion on the matter," and appointed delegates to investigate it further. It is hoped shortly to arrange a meeting between them and representatives of this Society.

The passing of even a voluntary Sterilization Bill or of an Act forbidding the marriage of mentally diseased persons—both now possibilities—would involve far more than the elimination of certain defective stocks. It would imply the general and legal acceptance of two fundamentally important concepts. Firstly, the recognition of the biological basis of humanity; secondly, the realization that the begetting of children is a privilege and responsibility, not a 'natural right.' These are the foundations of eugenic progress.

We cannot leave this subject without reference to one of the Bill's very few

adverse critics, a provincial paper's "Medical Expert"—a journalistic term which covers a multitude of pens. He makes the usual mistakes about heredity and refers (inaccurately) to weaklings who have risen to greatness. But his main argument is the difficulty of deciding who are defective, and the fear lest it should be his turn—or his reader's—to be sterilized next. We can only offer him this cold comfort, that he and all other good citizens are already in greater danger of being wrongfully convicted of shoplifting or of some much more revolting crime than ever they would be of sterilization.

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Comparable to the mentality of the above-mentioned "Medical Expert" is that of the speaker who recently said :

"I do not believe that vice is in the smallest degree an inherited quality. I believe that children are born the purest things that the world knows. . . ."

The objection to this statement is not that "vice" is inherited, but that it is *not* defined—neither are "inherited" nor "purest" the other two words on which the sense hangs. To the scientist it is meaningless. But to the layman, who accepts the words at the speaker's valuation, the meaning is, "Social conditions are as much responsible for the crimes men do as for the clothes they wear: one child is no more inherently liable to grow up a criminal than another"—which is palpable nonsense. It was only made palatable to a sentimental public by calling children "pure." Unhappily, the speaker was no pseudonymous journalist forced to write for his living on any subject, nor even a theologian with a prescriptive right to dogmatize on all subjects. He was the President of the Royal College of Surgeons, Sir Berkeley Moynihan, who, of all people, ought to avoid the loose and sweeping statements of the unscientific.

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It is a pity that the Cabinet have not been able to incorporate in their vast scheme of

Local Government Reform some of the proposals of the Denison House Committee for the reform of the Poor Law. Briefly, the D.H.C. fear that the transference of the powers of the Guardians to the County Councils will only enlarge the influence of the 'pauper vote,' causing all sorts of unrelated issues, such as Roads, Education, etc., to be biassed by consideration of the amount and method of Poor Relief. On this, the political aspect, this Society, of course, has no opinion. But the alternative scheme of the D.H.C.—suggested for London alone at first—has certain strong eugenic advantages. In effect, it proposes to vest the powers of the Guardians and the Metropolitan Asylums Board in a Board of Commissioners, who will be appointed by the Crown. They would be able, as would no elected bodies, to administer relief without regard to politics, to adjust and equalize scales of relief throughout the London area, and, in general, to carry out unpopular but necessary reforms, as did the Commissioners in 1834. Economies would be effected and overlapping avoided by bringing all institutions, workhouses, asylums, and the like, under one central body. The particular eugenic advantages would be (1) that mental and social defectives would receive only in-relief, instead of unlimited out-relief; (2) that it would be possible to segregate in labour colonies, if only for a time, the young of both sexes who, while not certifiably defective, will not or cannot work; (3) that the unification would enable the individual and family records of dependent migrants to be traced and registered on some standardized system—thus facilitating not only administration, but also more research like Mr. Lidbetter's.

Perhaps even now it is not too late to hope that some, at least, of these proposals may be incorporated in the new Act.

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Dr. Schiller's delightful application of the principles of biology and the ideals of eugenics to the reform of the House of Lords gained a great deal of notice in the Press—mostly favourable notice, though the

attitude of many of the critics was, "This is really a very sensible scheme; but I fear that only *I* can appreciate it. It will never be carried into practice"! This is a common feeling, that the British Constitution is a thing of organic growth, which can only change with evolutionary slowness and irrationality. But, as mutations have shown geneticists, organic growth is frequently sudden; while our own Constitution, from the first Magnum Concilium to the passing of the 'Flapper Vote,' has developed progressively by definite steps. Even the Lords might 'mutate.'

Dr. Schiller's article appears on page 237, and may well be read in conjunction with Mr. Gun's on page 245; for the latter, a continuation of his article in our July number, shows the origin and kinship of many of the Lords. Particularly interesting are the greatest of the Two Hundred, such men as Wolsey, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Bunyan; since they afford to the un-scientist his favourite argument, that greatness is not inherited. In fact, of course, they demonstrate precisely the opposite: their rise from humble circumstances shows that inborn qualities, not environmental advantages, are the cause of greatness. *Per contra*, the existence of numberless little people with all the advantages of wealth and position demonstrates the ineffectiveness of a good environment without a powerful heredity. If we were moulded by our circumstances, no genius would ever emerge from obscurity, no wastrel fall from high places: all poor men would be indistinguishable from one another, and all rich men as peas from a pod.

The article also teaches what no eugenicist needs to learn, that we know very little yet of the *mode* of inheritance of most human qualities, nor of the manner in which the genes and their combinations direct physiological and psychological development. Mr. Gun himself neatly summarizes the limit of our knowledge of the inheritance of genius—that it never comes from bad stock, but that from "ancestors who did small things well sprang descendants who did great things well." At the same time, his remarks on the

value of a mixed inheritance are suggestive. Is a genius or a man of high talent usually a hybrid, a fortunate combination of good, but not in themselves great, qualities? The evidence, such as it is, points that way—with the proviso that the strains which are crossed should be fairly closely allied. On the other hand, the genius may be merely the human counterpart of that familiar biological phenomenon, the increased vitality which usually follows, in the first generation, on heterosis. In either case, the deliberate breeding of geniuses must remain a dream of the distant future. We can only provide well-talented and untainted stocks, and let random mating do the rest. This much seems reasonably certain: that while the chances against an ordinary man rising to eminence are at least 500 to 1, they are 3 to 1 in favour of a man with an eminent relative. This is better than the 'Totalizator.'

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The Home Secretary has recently said:

"There must be some limit to the freedom of what a man may write or speak in this great country of ours. That freedom, in my view, must be determined by the question as to whether what is written or spoken makes the least of these little ones offend."

Interpreted as he intended it, this ban might cover much in the present REVIEW and other serious periodicals. Surely, therefore, the protection of "these little ones" purity of mind should consist in an extension, not of State control over literature, but of parental control over children? Meanwhile, the following suggestion has been seriously made to anyone with the money and public spirit to adopt it: That he institute a private prosecution against publishers of Shakespeare and the Bible, on the ground that these works contain obscene passages and are usually put into the hands of children.

No magistrate could fail to convict; and the revision of the law which would inevitably follow, might be more compatible than

the present Act with the interests of art and science and the dignity of citizenship.

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It is sad, but perhaps appropriate, that February 16th will be the occasion of Major Darwin's 'swan-song'; for it will be the twenty-first annual Galton dinner, when the *Society* comes of age. It is to be hoped that, after the training in wisdom and responsibility it has received from him, it will gain the voice in the nation's affairs to which it is now entitled—though, in a sense, its vote has already preceded its majority. Incidentally, one of his most useful services in making eugenics a living and practical contribution to social problems is his latest, the writing of *What is Eugenics?* which is reviewed by Dr. Ward Cutler on another page. Most Fellows and Members are faced, from time to time, with answering this question. We have seldom seen so clear, concise, and readable a reply to it.

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There has recently been a good deal of discussion of eugenics in the Roman Catholic Press, some writers even making a plea for eugenics and quoting in support Reports of the Board of Control, Tredgold, Goddard, and other well-known eugenists. This is welcome and, we may be pardoned for saying, surprising. The Roman Catholic Church had seemed, despite unconvincing disclaimers, to have set itself against every form of eugenics. We could understand, though not agree with, the belief that contraceptives, sterilization, and marriage bans are immoral and contrary to the Will of God. But Catholics have not been content with that dignified position. They have tried to strengthen it, for instance, by declaring that contraceptives cause sterility and cancer, or that sterilization is the same as castration and a disguised political attack on the working man. They have even denied or perverted the facts of genetics and natural selection, and approached the attitude of Tennessee—all in order to show that there is no need for eugenics. They would be on firmer ground if, still condemning practical measures, they joined us

in dispassionate research unbiassed by moral or theological issues—as the discussion in the *Universe* and *Catholic Times* gives hope that they eventually may. We could even respect the uncompromising attitude of Father McNabb, that research itself is revolting and wrong. But the strongest moral arguments are only weakened by bad science and mis-statements of fact.

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First Infant: "I'm told we're scarcer than we used to be."

Second Infant (feeling his biceps with satisfaction): "Yes; but just look at our condition."

The quotation is from that delightful person, *Mr. Punch*; and his infant's remark was prompted by the falling rate of infant mortality. He was well supported, for only recently Mr. Neville Chamberlain said that he did not think "there was any State Department which could point to such visible and gratifying results as those from the activities of the health service." It is one of the commonest beliefs, and not alone among the general public, that ours is a healthier nation than it used to be. Unhappily, it is less healthy. The physique of men has deteriorated, slightly but definitely, during the last two generations. The amount of sickness is going steadily up; and even *Mr. Punch's* infants, though they are better cared for and no longer die so easily from epidemic diseases, are a poorer lot than their predecessors. Two years ago Mr. Anthony Ludovici investigated the health of children in the London County Council schools. He found that as the feeding, cleanliness, standard of clothing, and general care of the children went up, the infant death rate declined, and—in the following years—there were fewer A1 children and a growing number suffering from constitutional defects. A lower 'damage' rate is more than offset by the increasing survival of weaklings.

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A sum of £30 has been received by the *Society* in memory of Miss Hilda Ines Scott, a former benefactress of the *Society*.